

Kenyon College

Peregrinations: Journal of Medieval Art and Architecture

Volume 7 | Issue 3

1-26

5-1-2021

The Lothar Crystal as a Relic of Saint Eligius

Mats Dijkdrent

MPhil student in art history at the University of Cambridge (Pembroke College)

Follow this and additional works at: <https://digital.kenyon.edu/perejournal>

 Part of the Ancient, Medieval, Renaissance and Baroque Art and Architecture Commons

Recommended Citation

Dijkdrent, Mats. "The Lothar Crystal as a Relic of Saint Eligius." *Peregrinations: Journal of Medieval Art and Architecture* 7, 3 (2021): 1-26. <https://digital.kenyon.edu/perejournal/vol7/iss3/1>

This Feature Article is brought to you for free and open access by the Art History at Digital Kenyon: Research, Scholarship, and Creative Exchange. It has been accepted for inclusion in *Peregrinations: Journal of Medieval Art and Architecture* by an authorized editor of Digital Kenyon: Research, Scholarship, and Creative Exchange. For more information, please contact noltj@kenyon.edu.

PEREGRINATIONS

JOURNAL OF MEDIEVAL ART AND ARCHITECTURE
VOLUME VII, NUMBER 3 (SPRING 2021)

The Lothar Crystal as a Relic of Saint Eligius

MATS DIJKDRENT

MPhil student in art history at the University of Cambridge (Pembroke College).¹

The 855 marriage between Lothar II, King of Lotharingia, and Theutberga (c. 840-875), daughter of Count Boso of Arles, turned out to be a disaster. Lothar was unfaithful to Theutberga, who remained childless, whilst he had four children with his mistress Waldrada. Lothar tried to divorce Theutberga so that he could produce a legitimate heir with Waldrada, accusing Theutberga of incest with her brother. In response, Lothar's bishops of Trier and Cologne annulled the marriage in 857, but the disgraced Theutberga tried to regain her honor by pleading her case before Pope Nicholas I. This was successful, and pope Nicholas threatened to excommunicate Lothar if he did not take Theutberga back as his wife. The couple reconciled publicly in 865 and, according to historian Philippe Lauer, it was on this occasion that Lothar gave Theutberga a precious crystal with the biblical story of Susanna, who was falsely accused of adultery by two elders (**Figure 1**).² Apparently all this was not

¹ I would like to thank Simon MacLean, Paul Bibire, Philip Muijtjens, Thijs Porck, Maartje Dingemans, Sarah Blick, and the anonymous reviewer for all their suggestions and help.

² Philippe Lauer, "Le joyau carolingien de Waulsort-sur Meuse," *Bulletin de la Société nationale des antiquaires de France* (1908), pp. 102-107.



Figure 1 Lothar Crystal (morse?), Story of Susannah, intaglio, 9th century, Lotharingia, Germany. Frame 15th century. Photo: British Museum.

enough to win back Theutberga's heart, for in the same year Theutberga asked the pope, without success, to dissolve her marriage. Determined to have an heir, Lothar went to Rome to persuade the pope to confirm his child with Waldrada as his rightful heir. Although the pope gave his blessing to Lothar, on his way back, Lothar



Figure 2 Two Elders try to Bribe Susannah into Adultery, Lothar Crystal (morse?), Story of Susannah, intaglio, 9th century, Lotharingia, Germany. Frame 15th century. Photo: British Museum.

died, leaving his brother as heir and his lands were divided between East and West Francia.³

Now the precious crystal that Lothar II gave to Theutberga can be found in the British Museum. The crystal, measuring only 11.5 cm in diameter (18.6 with the setting), is an extraordinarily refined and stunningly detailed artwork, that must have been made by highly skilled artisans. Although the date and maker are unknown, the crystal bears stylistic resemblance to 9th-century miniatures from Reims and the Abbey of Hautvillers. The crinkled drapery, the schematic temple architecture and the curly soil on the crystal are echoed in the 9th-century *Utrecht Psalter* from Hautvillers. Furthermore, the style is reminiscent of 9th-century ivory

³ Marie-Thérèse Bos, "Wat is overspel" in: Mayke de Jong, Marie-Thérèse Bos and Carine van Rhijn, eds., *Macht en gezag in de negende eeuw* (Hilversum, 1995), pp. 134-139; Alfred Auguste Ernouf, *Histoire de Waldrade, de Lothar II et de leurs descendants* (Paris, 1858); Sonja Marzinzik, *Masterpieces; Early Medieval Art* (London, 2013), p. 208.



Figure 3 Elders falsely accuse Susannah, Lothar Crystal (morse?), Story of Susannah, intaglio, 9th century, Lotharingia, Germany. Frame 15th century. Photo: British Museum.

made in Metz, and Lothringian art from Aachen. Genevra Kornbluth also connects the crystal based on stylistic similarities to several other 9th-century crystals that were used as seals by rulers.⁴

⁴ Percy Ernst Schramm and Florentine Mütterich, *Denkmale der deutschen Könige und Kaiser; I Ein Beitrag zur Herrschergeschichte von Karl dem Großen bis Friederich II; 768-1250* (München, 1981), pp. 125-126; Genevra Kornbluth, *Engraved Gems of the Carolingian Empire* (State College, 1995), pp. 7, 25-31; Koert van der Horst, William Noel and Wilhelmina C. M. Wüstefeld, *The Utrecht Psalter in Medieval Art; Picturing the Psalms of David* ('t Goy, 1996), pp. 212-213; J. Sauer, "Ein unbekannter Kristallschnitt des 9. Jahrhunderts" in: Wilhelm Worringer, eds., *Festschrift zum sechzigsten Geburtstag von Paul Clemen* (Bonn, 1926), p. 251.

The crystal shows the biblical story of Susanna (Daniel:13) in eight scenes. The first scene (at the top) shows how two elders try to bribe the married Susanna into committing adultery with them (**Figure 2**). Then, to the right of the center, the two elders avenge themselves after Susanna had refused to sleep with them. They decide to falsely accuse her of adultery and two men are sent to take Susanna into custody (**Figure 3**). Next Susanna is formally accused by the elders (**Figure 4**) and then, at the bottom, Susanna is dragged away after being found guilty by the elders (**Figure 5**). However, King Daniel intervenes and orders a retrial (**Figure 6**), interrogating one of the elders about the circumstances in which they witnessed Susanna committing adultery. Daniel recognizes that the elders bore false witness, as each gave different answers to the question: “under which tree did Susanna commit adultery?” (**Figure 7**) The punishment is swift, and they are executed. Left of center, the two bearded elders lie on the ground, while three men in tunicae stone them to death. (**Figure 8**) In the center, Susanna thanks Daniel. (**Figure 9**) While based upon the Vulgate, including inscriptions from that text,⁵ the two last images depict events not recounted in the Vulgate.

⁵ The text in scene 1 says: SVRREXER[VNT] SENES / SCA SVSANA / OCVRRER[VNT] SERVI (Daniel 13:19, the last line is not from the Vulgate). Scene 2: MITITE AD SVSANNA[M] (Daniel 13:29). Scene 3: MISER[VNT] MANVS (Daniel 13:34). Scene 4: CV[M]Q[VE] DVCERET[VR] AD MORTE[M] (Daniel 13:45). Scene 5: INVETERATE DIER[VM] MALOR[VM] (Daniel 13:52). Scene 6: RECTE MENTITVS ES (Daniel 13:55 or 13:59). Scene 7: FECER[VNT]Q[VE] EIS SICVT[I] MALE EGERANT (Daniel 13:61). Scene 8 bottom: ET SALVATVS E[ST] SAN[GVIS]INNOXIVS IN[DIE ILL]A (Daniel 13:62). Scene 8 top: LOTHARIVS REX FRANC[ORVM ME FI]ERI IVSSIT (also not from the Vulgate).



Figure 4 Elders formerly accuse Susannah, Lothar Crystal (morse?), Story of Susannah, intaglio, 9th century, Lotharingia, Germany. Frame 15th century. Photo: British Museum.



Figure 5 Susannah taken into Custody, Lothar Crystal (morse?), Story of Susannah, intaglio, 9th century, Lotharingia, Germany. Frame 15th century. Photo: British Museum.



Figure 6 Daniel interrogates an Elder, Lothar Crystal (morse?), Story of Susannah, intaglio, 9th century, Lotharingia, Germany. Frame 15th century. Photo: British Museum.



Figure 7 Daniel realizes the Elders have borne false witness and condemns them, Lothar Crystal (morse?), Story of Susannah, intaglio, 9th century, Lotharingia, Germany. Frame 15th century. Photo: British Museum.



Figure 8 Two Elders are executed by stoning, Lothar Crystal (morse?), Story of Susannah, intaglio, 9th century, Lotharingia, Germany. Frame 15th century. Photo: British Museum.

Few researchers studied the intriguing Lothar crystal. Most 20th-century studies revolve around the attribution of the crystal to Lothar II and its accompanying function.⁶ The connection between this crystal, and Lothar II is quite

⁶ 19th-century and early 20th-century publications on the crystal focused mainly on its style. See Henri Bordier and Édouard Charton, *Histoire de France depuis les temps les plus anciens jusqu'à nos jours; d'après les documents de l'art de chaque époque I* (Paris, 1859), p. 234, note 1; Alfred Bequet, "L'intaille carolingienne de l'abbaye de Waulsort," *Annales de la Société archéologique de Namur* 18 (1889), pp. 12-16; Léon Lahaye, "Etude sur l'abbaye de Waulsort de l'Ordre de Saint-Benoît," *Bulletin de la Société d'art et d'histoire du diocèse de Liège* 5 (1889), pp. 496-498; Ormonde M. Dalton, "The Crystal of Lothair," *Archaeologia: or Miscellaneous tracts relating to antiquity* 59 (1904), p. 28.

problematic, since it does not appear in any of the contemporary sources about the divorce.⁷ Nor do we have any contemporary sources on the maker, function, or the patron of the crystal.⁸ We only know that, at some point before 1150, the crystal ended up in the Benedictine abbey in Waulsort (in modern day Belgium), and that its mount was probably added between the 15th century and 17th century. The crystal left the abbey in 1793 and resurfaced not long after with a crack in the middle.⁹ The only clue regarding attribution is the inscription on the crystal, reading *Lotharius rex Franc[orum me fi]leri jussit*.¹⁰ **(Figure 9)** This article examines the validity of the claim, made by Philippe Lauer,¹¹ Valerie Flint,¹² and Genevra Kornbluth,¹³ that this phrase refers to Lothar II. I will argue that the phrase was added later and that we therefore cannot use it as a source for the attribution. However, first it is important to explore the historiography of the crystal.

⁷ See, for example, Letha Böhringer, *Monumenta Germaniae Historica ; Concilia; Tomus IV; Supplementum I; Hinkmar von Reims; De Divortio Lotharii Regis et Theutbergae Reginae* (Hannover, 1992).

⁸ For a full account of all the studies by year see: R. Didier, "A propos du 'béryl' de Lothaire et d'orfèvrerie des XII^e et XIII^e siècles provenant de l'ancienne abbaye de Waulsort," *Notes waulsortoises* 5 (Waulsort, 1987), pp. 210-217.

⁹ O. M., Dalton, *Catalogue of the engraved gems of the post-classical periods in the Department of British and Mediaeval antiquities and ethnography of the British Museum* (London, 1915), pp. 77-78; Kornbluth, *Engraved Gems*, pp. 31, 34-36. See also Alain Dierkens, *Abbayes et Chapitres entre Sambre et Meuse (VII^e-XI^e siècles)* (Paris, 1985), pp. 155-196.

¹⁰ Translation: *Lotharius, King of the Franks, ordered me to be made*. The original inscription is known because it was amongst others recorded by two monks in the late 18th century. Edmond Martène, and Durand Ursin, *Voyage littéraire de deux religieux benedictins de la Congregation de Saint Maur II* (Paris, 1724), p. 132.

¹¹ Philippe Lauer, "Le joyau carolingien," pp. 102-107.

¹² Valerie Flint, "Magic and Marriage in Ninth-Century Francia: Lothar, Hincmar – and Susanna," in: Marc Anthony Meyer, ed., *The Culture of Christendom; Essays in Medieval History in Commemoration of Denis L. T. Bethell* (London, 1993), pp. 61-74; Valerie I. J. Flint, "Susanna and the Lothar Crystal: a liturgical perspective," *Early Medieval Europe* 4:1 (1995), pp. 61-86.

¹³ Genevra Kornbluth, "The Susanna Crystal of Lothar II: Chastity, the Church, and Royal Justice," *Gesta* 31:1 (1992), pp. 25-39; Kornbluth, *Engraved Gems*.



Figure 9 Susannah thanking Daniel, Lothar Crystal (morse?), Story of Susannah, intaglio, 9th century, Lotharingia, Germany. Frame 15th century. Photo: British Museum.

In 1908, Philippe Lauer made the first serious effort to connect the crystal to Lothar II. Lauer sees a historical parallel between the story on the crystal and the divorce case of Lothar II and Theutberga, and the inscription *Lotharius rex Francorum me fieri jussit* refers therefore to Lothar II. The parallel is as follows; Susanna is falsely accused of adultery by two elders. Lauer sees in Susanna the falsely accused

Theutberga, and the elders are the bishops of Cologne and Trier. Lothar, in the form of King Daniel, is the hero of the story by discovering that the accusations are false and punishing the elders for them. Susanna's life is saved, and Theutberga's reputation is restored. Lauer supports his interpretation by noting that Hincmar, Bishop of Reims, in his account of the divorce in the book *De divortio Lotharii regis et Theutbergae reginae*, references the story of Susanna when he talks about false accusations in marriage.¹⁴

Several objections can, however, be made to Lauer's use of Hincmar as a source. Hincmar wrote his *De divortio*, a fictional dialogue about good marriage according to biblical, religious, and legal texts, around the year 860. This is five years before the reconciliation for which the crystal was made according to Lauer. Hincmar's thinking about the accusations does, therefore, not necessarily reflect how the reconciliation five years later was framed by Lothar. Moreover, in the four times Hincmar uses Susanna's story, Susanna is always mentioned as an example of false accusations. King David (sometimes together with Bathsheba), on the other hand, is referenced more than 20 times in the context of adultery and justice, making David's story a more likely choice to be associated with divorce and reconciliation.¹⁵

¹⁴ Philippe Lauer, "Le joyau carolingien," pp. 102-107. See for Hincmar: Letha Böhringer, *Monumenta Germaniae Historica; Concilia; Tomus IV; Supplementum I; Hincmar von Reims; De Divortio Lotharii Regis et Theutbergae Reginae* (Hannover, 1992), p. 226.

¹⁵ See for all references to Susanna: Rachel Stone and Charles West (trans.), *The Divorce of King Lothar and Queen Theutberga; Hincmar of Rheims's De divortio* (Manchester, 2016), pp. 142-143, 185-186, 188, 268-269. See also: Böhringer, *Monumenta Germaniae Historica*, pp. 20-28, 74-90.

The connection between the story of Susanna and the historical divorce is also not as direct as it first seems. Firstly, the iconography on the crystal does not correspond with other medieval Susanna-cycles or the story in the Vulgate on several points. In the Vulgate, the elders are not stoned to death, and Susanna does not pay gratitude to the enthroned Daniel.¹⁶ One would expect that the artist used this iconographic freedom to make the parallels between the historical event and the story more explicit, but this does not seem to be the case. Secondly, the historical parallel is so implicit that the story can refer to a number of events. R. Didier, for example, sees Waldrada in Susanna,¹⁷ while Rosamond McKitterick claims (without further explanation) that the crystal was ordered by Lothar I as a reconciliation gift to Queen Judith, whom he had slandered,¹⁸ and J. Sauer writes that the crystal does not refer to any historical event at all.¹⁹ Thirdly, in the Carolingian period, accusing someone of adultery was quite different from accusing someone of incest. The two were not considered to be interchangeable, as Lauer's interpretation seems to

¹⁶ Bonifatius Fischer, Johannes Gribomont, H. F. D. Sparks and W. Thiele, *Biblia Sacra; Iuxta Vulgatam Versionem* (Stuttgart, 1969), Daniel:13; Kornbluth, "The Susanna Crystal", pp. 28-31; Genevra Kornbluth, *Carolingian treasure; engraved gems of the ninth and tenth centuries* (Ann Arbor, 1986), pp. 282-288. For enthroned Daniel see Giuseppe Wilpert, *I sarcofagi Cristiani Antichi* II:1/2 (1932), pp. 252, CLXXXVII. For elders being stoned see: Stone, *The Divorce of King Lothar*, p. 143; Kathryn Smith, "Inventing Marital Chastity; The Iconography of Susanna and the Elders in Early Christian Art," *Oxford Art Journal* 16:1 (1993), pp. 3-24.

¹⁷ Didier, "A propos du 'béryl' de Lothaire," pp. 232-233.

¹⁸ Rosamond McKitterick, *The Frankish Kingdoms under the Carolingians 751-987* (London, 1983), p. 174.

¹⁹ Sauer, "Ein unbekannter Kristallschnitt," pp. 250-252.

suggest.²⁰ Fourthly, the biblical Daniel was not a king, but a prophet. Medieval kings are almost never personified in art as prophets.²¹

The basis on which Lauer attributes the making of the crystal to Lothar II is slight. Yet, Valerie Flint and Genevra Kornbluth, two researchers who conducted major studies in the past century into the crystal, adopted Lauer's attribution for their own reasons. Valerie Flint takes Lauer's attribution of the crystal to Lothar II for granted in her articles from 1993 and 1995 where she lays out an interpretation on how the crystal might have been used. Flint says that, in the 9th century, crystal was believed to have protective properties, so that when combined with the religious iconography, it would have made the crystal an effective talisman for Theutberga against any harmful magic that prevented her from becoming pregnant. Flint even suggests that Bishop Hincmar might have prescribed Lothar to order the crystal as an effective form of Christian "counter-magic."²² In her second article, Flint explores this thought further and tries to reconstruct the reconciliation occasion at which the crystal might have been given, namely the 'great crown wearing mass' at Gondreville in 865. Flint shows that the story of "Sancta" Susanna was, in Carolingian liturgy, loosely associated with being effective against magic, and proposes that the crystal might have been part of a flabellum that was made for the reconciliation.²³

²⁰ Rachel Stone, *Morality and Masculinity in the Carolingian Empire* (Cambridge, 2012), pp. 255-267, 289-292.

²¹ Excluding King David, who was king, but also made prophecies. Fischer, *Biblia Sacra*, Daniel:13.

²² Flint, "Magic and Marriage," pp. 61-74.

²³ Flint, "Susanna and the Lothar Crystal," pp. 61-86.

Kornbluth is more sceptical of Lauer's attribution. In her 1992 article, she explores the possible meaning of the crystal, presenting an interpretation of the crystal as a symbol for royal justice; that perhaps the crystal was used as royal propaganda to present Lothar II as a just king. She is, therefore, less supportive of the interpretation that the crystal acted as a reconciliation gift in the divorce case.²⁴ In her 1995 book, Kornbluth reemphasizes that, above all, the crystal had a political message. Furthermore, using stylistic analysis, she links the artwork to other engraved crystals and ivories and, in doing so, suggests Metz as a possible location of creation. Unfortunately, no written sources survive to substantiate this hypothesis.²⁵

Although both scholars have proposed new and intriguing interpretations regarding the use and meaning of the crystal, they have not found any additional evidence that the crystal must have been ordered by King Lothar II, though, in general, they still accept Lauer's attribution. Because of this, we can conclude that the connection between the crystal and Lothar II remains uncertain. This leaves room for further interpretation.

To do this, the inscription itself needs further analysis, for the exact phrasing of *Lotharius rex Francorum me fieri jussit* has received surprisingly little attention.²⁶ The existing literature assumes that the crystal was made in Lotharingia, or more

²⁴ Kornbluth, "The Susanna Crystal of Lothar II," pp. 25-39.

²⁵ Kornbluth, *Engraved Gems*, especially pp. 27-48.

²⁶ *Ibid*, p. 46.

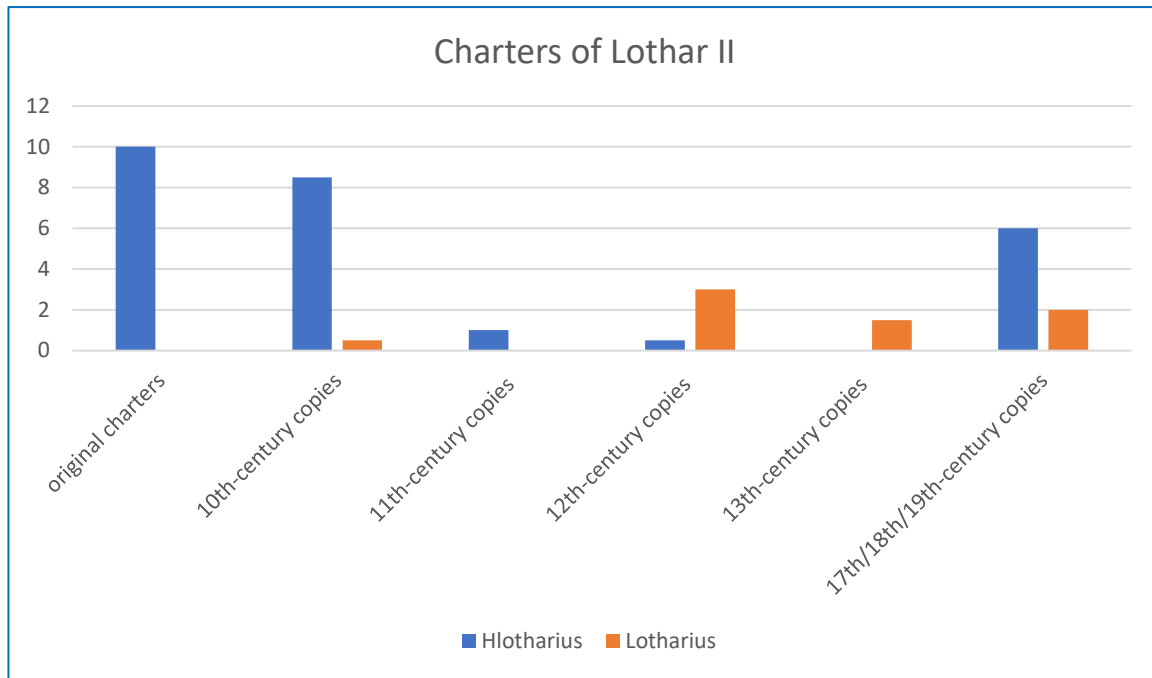
specifically in Aachen, Metz, or possibly Reims.²⁷ The spelling of *Lotharius* though does not support the notion that the crystal was made in Lotharingia and ordered by Lothar II. According to philologists, in 9th-century Lotharingia, the name “Lotharius” should be pronounced and spelled as “Hlotharius,” with the “h” representing the Proto-Germanic sound γ or $*/x/$. That sound is spelled in Old-Franconian as “ch” (like the Merovingian name Chlotarius). This changes to the Old-Low-Franconian name Hlotharius. Most West-Germanic languages dropped this “h” at the beginning of the 9th century, but Old-Low-Franconian (and Old Saxon), the major languages of Lotharingia, kept this “h” until the end of the 9th century.²⁸

The charters issued by Lothar II indeed show this philological feature when Lothar calls himself Hlotharius not Lotharius. If we look at the charters of Lothar II in the *Monumenta Germanicae Historiae*, we see that, of the 36 charters, only 7 (19%) show the name without an “h.”²⁹ The absence of the “h” in these 7 charters can be explained by examining when they were copied. The graph shows that none of the original charters wrote Lothar’s name without the “h.” Copies from the 10th-century still almost exclusively use the name “Hlotharius,” while, from the 12th-century

²⁷ Percy Ernst Schramm and Florentine Mutherich, *Denkmale der deutschen Könige und Kaiser; I Ein Beitrag zur Herrschergeschichte von Karl dem Großen bis Friederich II; 768-1250* (München, 1981), pp. 125-126; Kornbluth, *Engraved Gems*, pp. 30-31; Van der Horst, *The Utrecht Psalter in Medieval Art*, pp. 212-213; Sauer, “Ein unbekannter Kristallschnitt,” p. 251.

²⁸ Robert Lange Kyes, *Old Low Franconian Phonology* (Ann Arbor, 1965), pp. 368-369, 389-390; Wilhelm Braune, Karl Helm and Walther Mitzka, *Althochdeutsche Grammatik* (Tübingen, 1976), pp. 144-145; M. Schönfeld, *Wörterbuch der Altgermanischen Personen- und Völkernamen* (Heidelberg, 1965), p. 140; Ernst Gamillscheg, *Romania Germanica; Band 1: Zu den ältesten Berührungen zwischen Römern und Germanen, Die Franken* (Berlin, 1970), p. 387.

²⁹ Theodor Schieffer, *Monumenta Germaniae Historica; Diplomatum Karolinorum; Lotharii I. et Lotharii II. Diplomata III* (Berlin, 1966), pp. 51-311, 383-445.



onwards, this begins to change, and the “h” is dropped. We can, however, safely conclude that the inscription on the crystal does not reflect the philology of the 9th-century. Stylistically speaking, the crystal is probably from the 9th-century, meaning that the crystal was either made outside of Lotharingia or that the inscription on the crystal was added after the 9th-century.

The first option, that the crystal was made outside Lotharingia, has been argued by Jueles Labarte.³⁰ It is known that rulers like Lothar I ordered artworks from outside their realm,³¹ so based on precedents this is certainly possible. The question should, however, be posed whether it is likely that artists from outside Lotharingia would spell the name of their patron incorrectly, because not only does

³⁰ Jules Labarte, *Histoire des arts industriels au moyen âge et à l'époque de la Renaissance* (Paris, 1872), pp. 199-202.

³¹ See the Gospel of Lothar I, made in Tours. J. Hubert, J. Porcher and W. F. Volbach, *Carolingian Art* (London, 1970), p. 143, 145.

the spelling of the name on the crystal not align with Lothar II, but the titles are also garbled. *Lotharius rex Francorum* does not align with any titles of Lothar II, nor does it match the titles of Lothar I. The ‘rex’ in *rex Francorum* can be connected with Lothar II, but the ‘Francorum’ part cannot.³² In his charters, Lothar II calls himself *Hlotharius divina preueniente clementia rex* and *Hlotharii gloriosi regis*. Lothar I was emperor and called himself in charters: *Hlotharius augustus invictissimi domini imperatoris Hludovici filius* or *Hlotharius divina ordinante providentia imperator augustus*. In five charters by Lothar I, Francia, together with all the lands he ruled, is mentioned in the *subscriptio*, but the title *rex Francorum* is never used.³³ In Lothar II’s charters, Francia is never mentioned. The title *rex Francorum* was mostly a Merovingian title that was reintroduced after the treaty of Bonn in 921.³⁴ One would expect that the patron who ordered the crystal to be made wanted to be identified through this line. The discrepancy between the line on the crystal and the titles of its possible patrons therefore poses a problem.

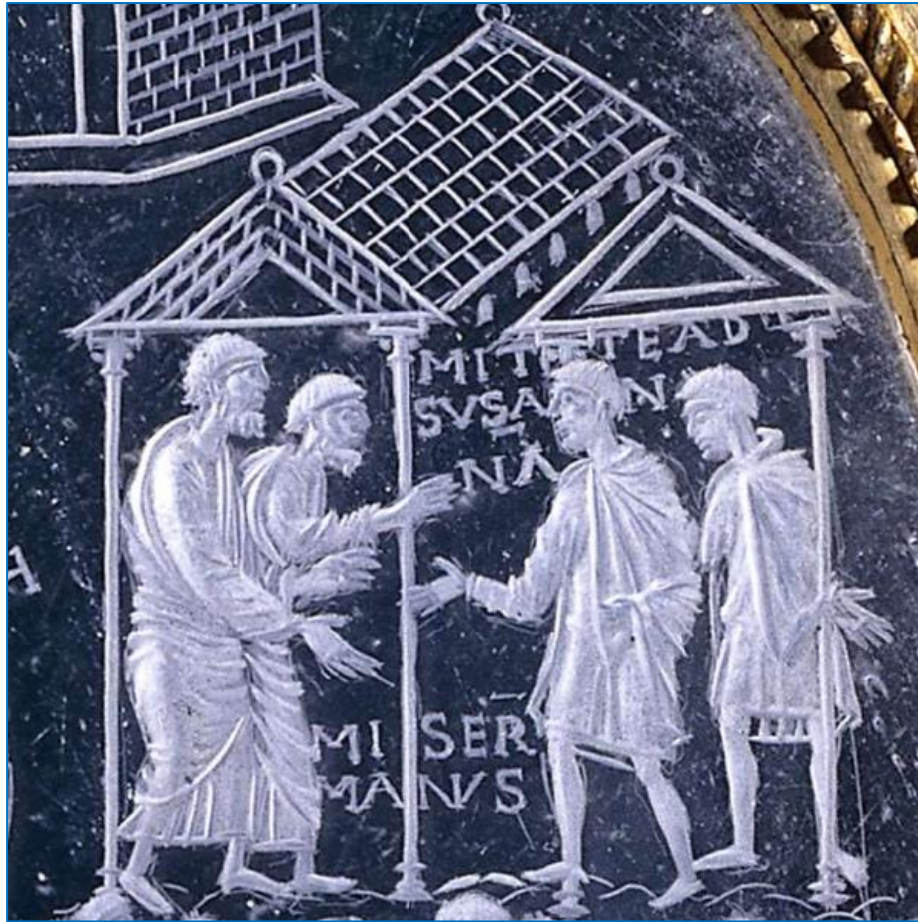
The line *Lotharius rex Francorum me fieri jussit* could have been added later. If we look at the inscriptions as a whole on the crystal, this seems to be a viable possibility. For instance, examining how inscriptions, like *Mitite ad Susannam* (**Figure**

³² Kornbluth, *Engraved Gems*, p. 46. See also: Kornbluth, “The Susanna Crystal of Lothar II,” p. 33. Kornbluth found just two 9th-century instances where Lothar was described as ‘King of Franks.’

³³ Schieffer, *Monumenta Germaniae Historica*, pp. 51-311, 383-445.

³⁴ Joachim Ehlers, Herbert Müller and Bernd Schneidmüller, *Die französischen Könige des Mittelalters; Von Odo bis Karl VII 888-1498* (München, 1996), p. 8; Ildar H. Garipzanov, *The Symbolic Language of Authority in the Carolingian World (c. 751-877)* (Leiden, 2008), pp. 261-318.

Figure 10 Detail of Figure 3, Elders falsely accuse Susannah, Lothar Crystal (morse?), Story of Susannah, intaglio, 9th century, Lotharingia, Germany. Frame 15th century. Photo: British Museum.



10), are written, we often see how the letters are squashed into the available space. The top of the words *Mitite ad* overlapped, for example, with the architecture, and there was even less space for *Susannam*, so the word is broken up in awkward places, resulting in a floating “n” between the two figures; there is also no straight baseline. Other inscriptions also lack space. The “r” of *surrexerunt* and the “c” of *sancta* in **Figure 2** overlap, for example, with the leaves of the tree.

From these observations, it can be deduced that the artists who made the depictions did not consider that text would be added at a later point. The form of these added letters is also much less sophisticated and well-considered than the figures. For instance, in **Figure 10** where the bow in the “d” in *ad* is unevenly

formed, or the second “i” in *mitite* disappears in the architecture, or the sloppy top of the second “a” in *Susannam*. Furthermore, “Susanna” is spelled inconsistently (compare **Figures 2 and 3**). Most strikingly, see **Figure 9** where the “f” of *Francorum* was initially forgotten and added later.³⁵ The haphazard nature of the lettering is in stark contrast with the intricate work of the images, strongly suggesting the two were completed separately.

Kornbluth opposes the possibility that the letters were added later by noting that the capitals on this artwork resemble those on other crystals from the same stylistic group.³⁶ Capitals were, however, always used when writing on hard surfaces. Capitals like the ones on the crystal are so stylized that they are almost impossible to relate to scribes or even time periods with any certainty. Taken together, this evidence suggests the inscriptions on the crystal are likely to have been added at a later date.

Thus, the question arises as to when the inscription was added. There is a source that suggests that the inscription was not yet present on the crystal around 1150. The *Historia Walciodorencis Monasterii*, a chronicle written in Waulsort Abbey, the place where the crystal was kept during the Middle Ages, mentions the following about the crystal:

This desirable treasure is made in the likeness of a remarkable collar, that the venerable Bishop Eligius, distinguished for his holiness, honor, and in all the skill of his work, made with his own hands, by order and command of the glorious Lotharius, King of the Angles. A Beryl stone positioned in the middle

³⁵ Dalton, “The Crystal of Lothair,” p. 26.

³⁶ Kornbluth, *Engraved Gems*, pp. 29-30.

contains a carving, of how [in the book] of Daniel Susanna is falsely accused by elders. [The stone] shows through the variety of its workmanship, the diligence of craft, and through its diligence the elegance of its high reputation. The English king, king of an eminent people, gave this [stone] to him. He hoped he will be pleased, after he gave many things for free.³⁷

Although the original chronicle was written around 1150, the only surviving copies date from the 15th and 16th-century. That is why most researchers assume that the original said *Lotharii regis Francorum* and that *Lotharii regis Anglorum* was a clerical mistake.³⁸ Yet this quotation tells us only that the mount was ordered by a certain Lotharius and was made by Eligius.³⁹ If the crystal already had an engraving in 1150 that said *Lotharius rex Francorum me fieri jussit*, it would seem strange that the chronicler thinks that only the mount was ordered by Lotharius, an English king. This indicates two possibilities. First, that the chronicler did not have access to the crystal and only had vaguely heard of the inscription that said *Lotharius rex Francorum*. Yet, given that the chronicle was written in Waulsort, this explanation seems to be unlikely. Or second, that the inscription was not yet there and there was

³⁷ Original: *Thesaurus autem iste desiderabilis compositus est in similitudinem insignis monilis, quem Eligius venerabilis episcopus, sanctitate, honestate et in omni operationis artificio egregius, precepto nutuque incliti Lotharii regis Anglorum manibus propriis operatus est. Lapis siquidem beryllus in medio positus sculptum retinet, qualiter in Daniele Susanna a senibus iudicibus male criminata sit, qui varietate sui operis diligentiam ostendit artis et diligentia venustatem locupletis honoris. Egregiae gentis rex Anglicus hunc dedit illi, Quem fore speravit gratum, dans plurima gratis, [...].* Source: G. Waitz, *Monumenta Germaniae Historica; Scriptorum XIV* (Hannover, 1883), p. 506.

³⁸ Genevra Kornbluth, "Susanna and Saint Eligius: Romanesque reception of a Carolingian Jewel," *Studies in Iconography* 16 (1994), p. 37. A 16th-century history copied from the chronicle and took over 'rex Anglorum'; Jean-Baptiste Gramaye, *Antiquitates Comitatus Namurcensis; libris et compraehensae, pro ratione totidem praefectarum in eo* (Leuven, 1608), p. 24v.

³⁹ Martin Kemp, eds., *The Oxford History of Western Art* (Oxford, 2000), p. 94.

only a legend about a certain King Lothar who ordered the mount and not the crystal.

No sources about the crystal exist from the High and Late Middle Ages. In Early Modern period, the crystal, not the mount, is consistently seen as made by Eligius and ordered by Lotharius, King of the Franks. See, for example, this 18th-century travel book by two Benedictine monks:

He showed us a crystal of rock, decorated with precious gems, on which we saw the story of Susanna, [it was] very finely engraved, as we have mentioned, by Sint Eligius. [On the stone] we read "*Lotharius rex Francorum me fiert jussit.*"⁴⁰

Or a description from 1628 by Arnoldus Rayssius, who more or less copied the text from the *Historia Walciodorencis Monasterii*, but adds that it was ordered by Lotharius, King of the Franks *vt ex eius sculptura cognoui*.⁴¹ *Eius* refers here to Eligius and uses the term *sculptura* meaning 'something that is carved out.' Therefore, this phrase *Lotharius rex Francorum me fiert jussit* was present by the Early Modern period.

These quotes reflect that the artwork was probably seen as a relic, for Eligius was a famous saint.⁴² In the first quotation, only the mount was thought to be made by Eligius for Lothar, King of the English. This belief shifted over time, for in the early modern quotes, the crystal, and not the mount was thought to have been made

⁴⁰ Original: *Il nous fit voir un cristal de roche orné de pierres precieuses, sur lequel on voit l'histoire de Susanne très finement gravée, à ce qu'on précent, par S. Eloi, sur lequel on lit Lotharius rex Francorum me fiert jussit.* Source: Edmond Martène, and Durand Ursin, *Voyage litteraire de deux religieux benedictins de la Congregation de Saint Maur II* (Paris, 1724), p. 132.

⁴¹ Translation: *As you know from the carving.* Arnoldus Rayssius, *Hierogazophylacium Belgicum; sive Thesaurus sacrarum reliquiarum Belgii* (Cologne, 1628), p. 543.

⁴² Ibidem, 543; Kornbluth, "Susanna and Saint Eligius," p. 40.

by Eligius for Lothar, King of the Franks. The crystal was even given a new mount in the 15th-century.⁴³ Although it is unknown why the old mount was replaced, it does indicate that, in the 15th century, the crystal was seen as Eligius' (main) relic. After all, it would be strange to replace a "holy" mount with a normal one.

The question remains, however, why medieval and early-modern visitors did not think it strange that a 7th-century saint (Eligius) made a crystal for a 9th-century king (Lothar). To solve this, we should look at the *vita* of Saint Eligius; Saint Eligius lived in 7th century Francia, as a goldsmith. Abbo of Limoges recommended King Clothar II (584-630) give Eligius the commission to make a new throne. Since Eligius showed his honesty by returning the gold and gemstones he had not used in making the throne back to the king, he was appointed Master of the Mint in Marseille. Eligius stayed in that position during the reign of Clothar's heir, Dagobert I (603-639) and, as courtier, he made several artworks for the king, while using his office and wealth to free slaves. After Dagobert's death, Eligius became Bishop of Noyon and there he converted pagans in Flanders and Frisia and performed miracles.⁴⁴

I would argue that people from the medieval and early-modern period seem to have read *Lotharius rex Francorum* as a reference, not to Lothar II or Lothar I, but to Clothar II, the king for whom Eligius made beautiful artworks. It is not strange that they make a connection between *Lotharius rex Francorum* and Clothar II. After all, in

⁴³ Kornbluth, *Engraved Gems*, pp. 31, 34-36.

⁴⁴ Jo Ann McNamara, "Dado of Rouen, Life of St Eligius of Noyon" in Thomas Head, ed., *Medieval Hagiography; An Anthology* (New York, 2001), pp. 137-168.

the medieval *vitae* of Eligius, written in France and the Low Countries between the 9th and the 15th centuries, half of the time Clothar II is referred to as *Lotharius* (7x), followed by Hlotharius (2x), Clotharius (3x), and Chlotharius (2x). In almost all cases, Clothar is given the title *rex Francorum* (12x).⁴⁵ Bollandists Godefridus Henschenius and Daniel van Papenbroeck indicate in their 1675 book that the English King Lotharius that was mentioned in the *Historia Walciodorencis Monasterii* indeed refers to Clothar II from Eligius' *vita*.⁴⁶

Combining the facts: the inscriptions on the crystal were in all likelihood added at a later date than the crystal was made, the crystal was seen as a creation of Saint Eligius in the later Middle Ages and early modern period, and the title *Lotharius rex Francorum* on the crystal matches the 'title' of King Clothar II in the *vita*

⁴⁵ Lotharius (7x) in: Anonymous, *Vitae et passionis; Vita sancti Eligii*, Bibliothèque nationale de France (Paris), Latin 16735, 130r; Anonymous, *Vitae sanctorum; Eligius, auct. Audeno*, Bibliothèque nationale de France (Paris), Latin 17007, 129v; Anonymous, *Vitae sanctorum; Eligius*, Bibliothèque nationale de France (Paris), Latin 14364, 157r; Anonymous, *Vitae; Vita sancti Eligii: authore Dadone, Rothomagensi Episcopo*, Bibliothèque nationale de France (Paris), Latin 5327, 107v; Anonymous, *Vitae; Vita sancti Eligii, Episcopi et Confessoris, libris quatuor*, Bibliothèque nationale de France (Paris), Latin 5287, 128v; Anonymous, *Vitae; Vita sancti Eligii, Episcopi: finis desideratur*, Bibliothèque nationale de France (Paris), Latin 5308, 323v; Anonymous, *Vita sancti Eligii episcopi*, Koninklijke Bibliotheek van België/Bibliothèque royale de Belgique (Brussels), ms. 5374-75, 25r. Hlotharius (2x) in: Anonymous, *Vitae sanctorum; Vita sancti Eligii episcopi*, Bibliothèque nationale de France (Paris), Latin 5359, 92r; Anonymous, *Vitae; Vita Eligius*, Biblioteca Apostolica Vaticana (Rome), Reg. lat. 568, 3r. Clot(h)arius (3x) in: Anonymous, *Tractatus de vita et miraculis s. Eligii, anno 1183 absolutus*, Bibliothèque nationale de France (Paris), Latin 17631, 88r; Anonymous, *Vies de saints; Eligius; vita, auct. Audeno, et miracula*, Bibliothèque nationale de France (Paris), Latin 12607, 6r; Anonymous, *Vies de saints; Eligius*, Bibliothèque nationale de France (Paris), Latin 11759, 267v. Chlotharius (2x) in: Anonymous, *Vies de saints; Eligius*, Bibliothèque nationale de France (Paris), Latin 12606, 161v; Anonymous, *Vitae; Vita sancti Eligii, Episcopi Noviomensis et Confessoris: authore sancto Audoëno*, Bibliothèque nationale de France (Paris), Latin 5365, 174v. The following manuscripts do not have '*Francorum*': Anonymous, *Vies de saints; Eligius*, Bibliothèque nationale de France (Paris), Latin 11759, 267v; Anonymous, *Vitae; Vita sancti Eligii, Episcopi et Confessoris, libris quatuor*, Bibliothèque nationale de France (Paris), Latin 5287, 128v.

⁴⁶ Godofredus Henschen and Daniel van Papenbroeck, *Acta Sanctorum Aprilis; Tomus III* (Antwerp, 1675), p. 817.

of Eligius. These imply that the inscription *Lotharius rex Francorum* was added somewhere after 1150 to connect the crystal to Saint Eligius, and in doing so, make it into a relic.

Having a real relic of Saint Eligius could be a source of income. Eligius was after all a popular saint in Flanders and Picardy, and the piece could attract a lot of pilgrims.⁴⁷ That might have tempted the monks of Waulsort to add the inscriptions. Indeed, Waulsort Abbey was known for its forgeries and had produced many fraudulent charters. Many medieval institutions produced an occasional forgery, but of the sixty medieval charters that have been passed to us from Waulsort, between eight and eleven are falsifications.⁴⁸ This shows that some abbots of the abbey were willing to forge documents if doing so was in the interest of the monastery. Faking the inscription that heightened (or even proved) the provenance of a work of art, already thought to be what the inscription purported, appears to be the kind of lie the abbots were willing to tell. This might have been done sometime in the 13th century, in response to the stricter church policy concerning the authentication of relics.

One could object to this interpretation of the line *Lotharius rex Francorum me fieri jussit* as it would have been more likely for the monks to inscribe “Saint Eligius

⁴⁷ David Hugh Farmer, *The Oxford Dictionary of Saints* (Oxford, 1978), p. 130; Erika J. Laquer, “Ritual, Literacy and Documentary evidence: Archbishop Eudes Rigaud and the Relics of St. Eloi,” *Francia; Forschungen zur westeuropäischen Geschichte* 13 (1985), pp. 625-637.

⁴⁸ Georges Despy, *Les chartes de l'abbaye de Waulsort, étude diplomatique et édition critique, t. I : 946-1199* (Brussels, 1957).

made this” if they wanted to make that claim. Although this seems obvious to someone now, in the Middle Ages, artists rarely signed their artwork. Naming the patron might have been the obvious choice in the Middle Ages to connect an artwork to an artist.⁴⁹

In summary, after having examined the question to what extent the line *Lotharius rex Francorum* on the crystal can be interpreted as referring to Lothar II, we can conclude the connection is not as solid as earlier authors believed. If viewed from a philological angle, the phrase *Lotharius rex Francorum* must have been written outside of Lothringia or after the 9th-century. The title that does not correspond makes it even less likely that Lothar I or II were the patrons of the crystal. The difference in quality between the inscriptions and the figures also make it possible that the inscriptions were added at a later date. The *Waulsort Chronicle* hints at the absence of the engraving in 1150. The later history of the piece indicates that the crystal was seen as a work by Saint Eligius. The inscription *Lotharius rex Francorum* is mirrors the title of Clothar II, the patron of Eligius, is given in the *vitae*. The inscription might have been added to strengthen the claim that the crystal was made by Eligius, and therefore, should be revered as a relic.

The implications of this finding are twofold. Firstly, by challenging the hundred-year-old consensus that the inscription refers to Lothar II, this article explores new histories of the crystal. Secondly, the crystal has often been used as a

⁴⁹ Heinrich Klotz, “Formen der Anonymität und des Individualismus in der Kunst des Mittelalters und der Renaissance,” *Gesta* 15:2 (1976), pp. 303-312.

source for the history of the divorce because it showed that Lothar made a real effort at reconciliation. Therefore, this article sheds new light on the divorce case.

Although this interpretation is plausible, it does not mean other interpretations of the phrase are impossible, and I hope this article will trigger a renewed debate about the origin of the crystal, as well as on Carolingian crystals in general. 🐼